



Artist Rossana Dewey holds her self-portrait from day eight when she learned she was laid off from work. Dewey said she felt erased that day, as that feeling is depicted in her self-portrait. /DARREN LUM Staff

# Daily account of the pandemic in self-portraits

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Pulling out scraps of wood with her likeness from a tin container, painter Rossana Dewey's series of self-portraits made during the pandemic reveal the emotions she's gone through, one day at a time.

Several 2.5-by-two-inch squares lie on the table as she shows how she looked on day eight when she was told she was laid off from a part-time job in Toronto. It's a vague depiction of Dewey. Few details are discernible, except for the shape of the face and the length of her hair. "I felt erased," she said.

Losing her job was a hard blow for the West Guilford resident who has been exhibiting her artwork for the past seven years, including in Haliburton County art tours.

Initially, her intention was to complete the diary-like self-portraits for 14 days, coinciding with a two-week quarantine, but has since extended the project.

"Let's see how I depict myself over that time while I have to stay at home. It will be good for me to do and it'll keep me busy. I just kept going with it as the lockdown got extended," she said.

Dewey started the project on March 21 and calls it a "personal documentation."

As of April 30, she had completed a self-portrait for 35 days. It started with small oil paintings on scraps of wood from her husband's workshop while she looked into her mirror. Then she started to use a small book, painting self-portraits with similar dimensions. Then she moved to add paintings to a concertina book, using gouache paint – an opaque version of watercolour paint. Now she is using mixed media for her self-portraits in the concertina, which has pages that are folded like an accordion and can unfold in a long section.

Other than her outings for food at the grocery store in Eagle Lake, and her walks and runs, she hasn't left her house or her neighbourhood. She's losing track of time, unsure of the days of the week. The collection of her work will be a record of her time and has helped to give her something to focus on and helps her to get herself away from the news. Up until recently, her self-portraits did not include backgrounds, only showing the emotion on her face. She'll look to add backgrounds of the places where she completes her self-portraits, which have been anywhere in the house – representative of the world she and many are living in during the pandemic.

"We're all just roaming the house because that's our world right now," she said.

As of now there aren't any plans to exhibit her work.

However, she said she'll be contacting the Haliburton Highlands Museum, which has asked the public to contribute stories of their lives during the pandemic.

Part of her inspiration, she said, was the story of Anne Frank, who is known for documenting the two years she



Rossana Dewey is a West Guilford painter, who wanted to document her time during the coronavirus while under self-isolation. Her work, which has depicted her daily emotions, has spanned the past several weeks and will continue for the duration of the health crisis.

lived hidden from the Nazis, in a *Diary of a Young Girl*, before she was captured and taken to a concentration camp where she died during the Second World War. Her account was published after the war.

"I'm in a different lockdown, but we're all being asked to stay at home. We're being asked to be indoors, to stay away from others ... our fear is a different fear. It's a virus. But that's how I decided. It just evolved into me thinking, 'Yeah, I need to document what is happening to me now.' Not that I had any other intent. I thought it was only going to be 14 days, but the 14 days of isolation turned into stay at home, which it still feels like ... you're self-isolating yourself from the world, your life. It is what is happening. ... everything seems to be a shadow of what we had before," she said.

Her true feelings came out in her work, as she documented what she saw each day in the mirror.

"I wasn't trying to be realistic. I really wanted to capture how I was feeling and I'm really seeing that. Some of the images I see how they're not exuberant and filled with life. They do feel kind of alone. ... Even if I try to make myself look a little bit happier, it doesn't seem to work. It's funny how that's kind of happened. It is what's going on."



Painter Rossana Dewey looks in the mirror to paint a self-portrait, as part of her project to document herself during self-isolation. Dewey initially wanted to complete a self-portrait each day over 14 days, but that has grown into more than 35 and will continue until closures are lifted and movement is allowed.